Up Country in Panama

By Forbes Lindsay

A STREET IN DAVID

MADE the 300 miles journey up to David, the capital of the Province of Chiriqui, in a coasting steamer of the house-boat type, with open lower desk and galvanized iron roof over all—20 feet out of water and only 6 feet draft with full load.

David was founded somewhat more than a century ago by the the first of the Panaman Obaldias, who created a princely estate from a royal grant of land. Mangote, situated about 8 miles from the town, is now in the hands of his great-grandsons, whose father was lately president of the republic. Before the revolutionary days many Chiricano landowners maintained a lordly estate in peace and prosperity.

David is an attractive place, clean and orderly as a Dutch burg and picturesque as a Tyrolean hamlet. Along the broad, drab lengths of the streets are lined modest dwellings with whitewashed walls, red-tiled roofs, and blue and green doors and window shutters. The most pretentious residences are no more than two-storied frame structures, with 10 rooms at most and a patio in the rear. Of the 5,000 inhabitants perhaps 50 are "well to do," in the conventional sense of the phrase. The remainder are superlatively poor, measured by the standard of dollars and cents, but passing rich in fact by reason of having everything that they need and probably all they desire. Everyone seems to secure an easy livelihood, but precisely how is difficult to determine. A hard worker is not to be seen, but neither is a beggar nor a vagrant, and the municipality does not boast any such institution as an almshouse. However, the matter is divested of much of its mystery when one considers that land as prolific as any in the world is to be had for the taking, and a man's outfit of clothing consists of three pieces—straw hat, shirt, and cotton trousers—while a woman gets along very well with one garment, and children are not encumbered to that extent.

Although the dry season was well-nigh spent, everything looked fresh and green the morning that I galloped out upon the llano on my way to Divala. My moso, a long, lean fellow with a melancholy visage, followed at a pace which he never varied, but which later experience taught me could always be depended on to bring him up with me at the end of a ride. Man never possessed a less appropriate name than his Pantaleon—"panther lion"—was possibly bestowed upon him in a spirit of irony. He was profoundly self-possessed and had the commendable characteristic of confining his attention to his own business and just so much of his employer's as properly concerned him.

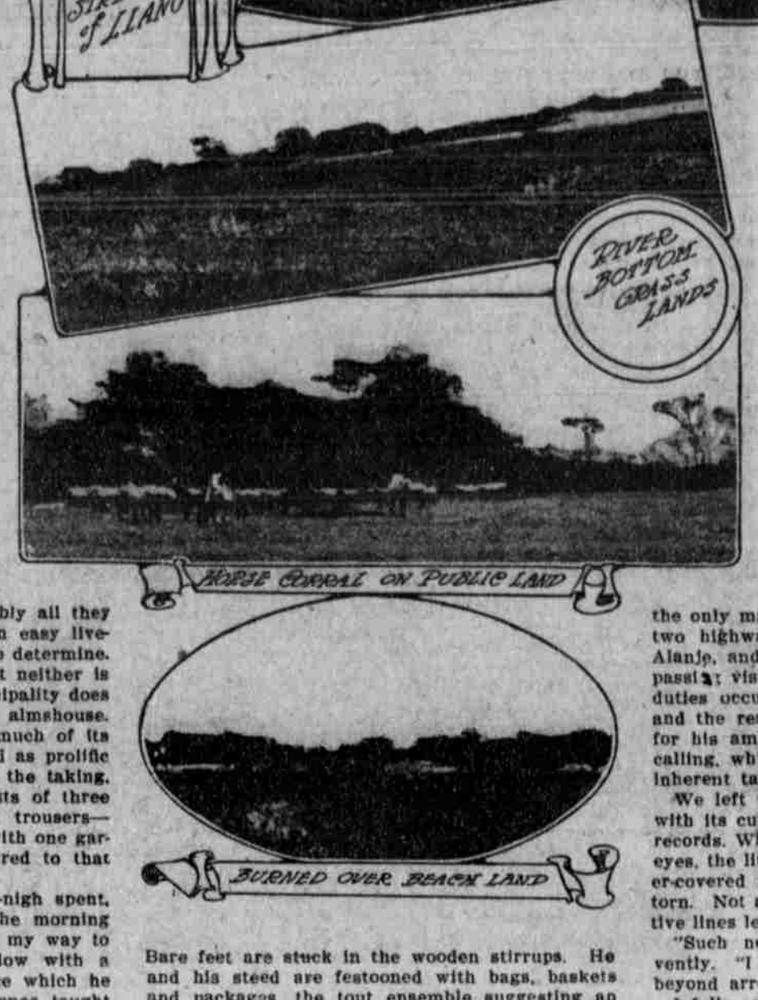
Before us stretched one of the llanos, which lie, like grassy islands in a forest sea, at intervals all along the Pacific slope of the Cordillera. For 6 miles onward and 2 on either side of us the ground extended in a sweep as level as a billiard table and as green. With its thick covering of jenjebrillo, the tract looked strikingly like a bit of the blue-grass country of Kentucky. Here and there a wild fig or a ceibo threw its heavy-leafed branches wide, affording grateful shelter for man and beast. On every side the close ranks of the forest trees hemmed the llano in, and away beyond in our front rose the jabbed teeth of the sierra, with the smoking cone of El Volcan projecting beyond the ruck.

A well-worn crack indicates the shortest route to the point where the road enters the forest. We keep it in sight for the sake of preserving our bearing, otherwise one might ride unrestrainedly on the darkest night over this flat expanse, unbroken by gullies and devoid of burrows. In fact, I have crossed it at a hand gallop in a downpour of rain, when my horse's ears were not distinguishable and the blurred lights of David made a lurid beacon patch in the distance.

These llanos are the "commons" of the people—the poor man's grazing ground. We pass small herds of from 10 to 20 head, nibbling the herbage, which is ample for sustenance but not sufficiently rich and plentiful to condition them for market.

Scattered over the range are a few mares, with foals at their heels. In this country they ride and work only the male horses, leaving the females constantly at grass. This is obviously a bad system, for it retards hereditary transmission and results in the development of serviceable qualities on one side only. The animals are undersized and the breed poor, the best strain being derived from Peruvian stallions. Despite his unpromising appearance, however, the Panamanian pony is apt to surprise you with a wonderful display of stamina. I have been carried fifty-odd miles by one in twelve hours and found him fit for a good day's journey the next morning. They are easy-going beasts, with a single-foot gait, and if one will be content to ride them in the manner to which they are accustomed, quite as serviceable as the average mount to be picked up in Central or South America. It is distinctly advisable, however, to get rid of the greasy hair bridle of the country, even though no better substitute than a piece of clean rope is available. Failure to take this precaution once cost me a sore hand of which I was not cured for weeks.

Now and again a traveler jogs by, with a muttered "Buenos dias"—a salutation that is never omitted by man, woman or child. The rider wears a conical straw hat, a cotton shirt, flapping free in the wind, and a pair of blue jeans.



Bare feet are stuck in the wooden stirrups. He and his steed are festooned with bags, baskets and packages, the tout ensemble suggesting an itinerant Christmas tree. Stuck under the saddle flap, or elsewhere beyond ready reach, is a rifle or shotgun, of ancient make, probably unserviceable, and almost certainly unloaded. Everyone goes armed upon the road.

Occasional reminders of less peaceful times are seen in a small wooden cross set in the ground and surrounded by a rude rail fence, indicating the spot where some unfortunate met a violent death in the commission of a crime. Pantaleon rode alongside as I approached one of these unconsecrated burying places that contained two crosses. With emotionless precision he told the grizzly tale of two compadres who had fallen out and here had fought to the death with their knives.

Compadres are bosom companions, bound by a bond closer than that of brotherhood. Only a woman can break that tie, and when compadre turns against compadre hell knows no greater bitterness. These two hacked each other until they fell, gasping and bleeding, and foaming at the mouth, still jabbing with waning strength. They were found dead, locked in each other's arms. Perhaps at the very last the spirit of compadreship returned to soothe their passing.

I put this reflection to Pantaleon, but he declared it more likely that they died cursing each other and thinking of the girl. My own conclusion pleased me better, but I felt bound to defer to my moso's superior knowledge of the characteristics of his countrymen.

Presently the road entered the monte, and we rode between wooden walls reinforced by heavy undergrowth. At long intervals we passed small clearings where the settler had cut over the ground, burned the debris where it fell, and scattered his seed with a careless, confident hand. The machete is the universal agricultural implement. A plow has never been seen in the country. Cultivation is neglected as an unnecessary trouble. Withal, harvests are bounteous and recur with the infallible regularity of the solar system. I saw fields of sugar cane that had yielded rich crops for fifteen unbroken seasons, and a piece of land which has stood in corn continuously for half a century.

All over the Pacific slope of Chiriqui is a topsoil, from 6 to 20 feet thick, formed by the volsages from the mountain sides. It is rich as any in the world, but not one-hundred-thousandth part of it has been turned to the account of man. Outside of David, the population is less than four to the square mile. Apart from a score of cattle raisers and coffee growers, no man produces more than enough to meet his needs, whilst markets at their very doors are crying aloud for the potential products of the province. Panama is paying high prices for Jamaican fruit and Cuban sugar and American tobacco, whilst these and many other imported commodities can be grown within her borders.

The pathetic mystery of it is that tens of thousands are slaving in city sweatshops and factories, or painfully wringing a living from a reluctant soil, when land unlimited lies waiting to richly reward any man who will cast a handful of seed upon it.

Ten miles out from David we came to Alanje, a pueblo of only a few hundred inhabitants, but a place of consideration in this sparsely settled country. There are no hotels in the interior, nor is there need for them where every door is open to the wayfarer. The first glance around the plaza of Alanje will decide the discriminating stranger to head for the comfortable-looking frame house on the south side, with its inviting veranda. Should he not immediately take that direction, the little cura, in his long black robe, is likely to come to the door and shout a welcome.

The mid-day breakfast at the cural was an excellent meal, reinforced by good wine and superb coffee. The pleasures of the occasion were heightened by the entertaining remarks of my lively host. He was very young and very optimistic, quite content with his lot and properly impressed with the importance of his work. It appeared to me that his life must be a lonely and monotonous one, but he did not share my view of it. He was the only man of any education in the village, but two highways and several byways converge at Alanje, and every few days he might look for a passing visit from some intelligent traveler. His duties occupied three or four hours of the day and the rest of the time he filled in with study, for his ambition pointed to advancement in his calling, whilst his environment had awakened an inherent taste for natural history.

We left the table to walk over to the church, with its curious detached tower. I asked for the records. With righteous indignation blazing in his eyes, the little cura laid before me a pile of leather-covered manuscripts, molded, worm-eaten, and torn. Not a page was intact, hardly two consecutive lines legible.

"Such neglect is crime," said my host, fervently. "I need hardly say that the damage was beyond arrest when these came into my hands."

I fully appreciated his feelings. Indeed, I dare say that my own regret was the keener. Alanje is older than David. In fact, its history merges with the times of the Conquistadores and there is no knowing what wondrous tales may be hidden in those sadly mutilated documents.

"Our church has a legend," remarked the cura, leading me to a large alcove on the left of the chancel. Drawing aside a curtain, he revealed a life sized painting of the Christ in his final agony. It was evidently the work of an artist, but did not betray extraordinary ability.

"I don't know when this came here, but it was certainly before the present generation," the cura explained, with a slight show of embarrassment. "The story goes that one evening a stranger came to the village and, declining shelter elsewhere, begged to be locked alone in the church over night. His request was granted. When the curious villagers came early in the morning to look for him he had gone, and the picture, with the paint fresh and wet, hung where you see it."

I looked at the little cura questioningly.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, with a shamefaced smile and a shrug of the shoulders. "At any rate, my people believe the story firmly, and it does them no harm."

On the road between Alanje and Divala we crossed several streams. A better watered country than this could not well be imagined.

Divala is a little settlement of 50 to 60 huts and, perhaps, 300 inhabitants, who are entirely dependent upon the ranch and insure it a constant supply of labor. The people cultivate little patches, from which they derive almost all the foodstuffs they need. A few weeks' work in the year at 60 cents a day will produce enough money for clothing and a moderate indulgence in the luxuries that are to be had at the village trading store.

Divala is 15 miles from anywhere, but the most unlikely place to look for an American family in a bungalow that has the appearance of having been transplanted from a New Jersey suburb. Mrs. Wilson has lived in this out-of-the-way corner of the earth for five years, and has had the companionship of her infant during the past eighteen months. There is not a woman of her own race within 40 miles. This is isolation, indeed, and I suspected that she must find it irksome, though she would not admit as much.

Twelve years ago Leslie Wilson came out from California and settled in the neighborhood of Divala with half a dozen Americans and Britishers. Thus the settlement of Divala was formed and a large proportion of the ranch turned into Potrero without a penny of outlay. The disturbed condition of the country reduced the prices of all property, and Wilson was able to buy the nucleus of his stock at very low figures.

The owner of Divala has worked hard and intelligently for ten years on the improvement of his property. Today he has 5,000 acres of as fine land as any in Chiriqui, well stocked and furnished with all the necessary buildings. The ranch is easily worth $50,000. Not a bad result of an enterprise started twelve years ago with $200 capital.

IN THE PUBLIC EYE

NEW BISMARCK OF GERMANY

Germany has another Bismarck. He is Alfred von Kiderlen-Waechter, who is secretary of foreign affairs and who is the big man in Germany's foreign relations. It is he who set Europe by the ears over the Morocco situation.

Kiderlen-Waechter has been secretary of embassy at St. Petersburg and Paris and counsellor of embassy at Constantinople. He is a linguist, speaking the leading languages of the continent and being as proficient in English as in his own native German.

Two years ago Herr Alfred was a comparatively little known member of Germany's diplomatic corps, holding the post of minister to Roumania. He was rated as a man of ability and force with a more salient and sharply defined personality than that of the average government official, but the public heard little of him. Recently he has been the man of the hour in Germany and probably the most talked of statesman in Europe. For the events that precipitated the international crisis with its menace of impending war he more than any one else was responsible.

Herr von Kiderlen's active career has been entirely in the diplomatic service. Entering the foreign office in 1879, he has gone through the usual mill of slow promotions from embassy secretaryships in St. Petersburg, Paris and Constantinople to the post of minister to Copenhagen in 1895 and to Bucharest in 1900. His career, however, has not been without its ups and downs.

CHICAGO BANKER ON PAROLE

John R. Walsh of Chicago, who has been paroled from the Leavenworth prison, was convicted in 1906 of a violation of the federal banking laws, the technical charge being that of making false reports with reference to the financial status of the Chicago National Bank, of which he was president.

The liberated financier is now 74 years old. He was born in Ireland in 1837, and came to Chicago when he was 10 years old, beginning life as a newsboy. In 1861 he established a news agency which later developed into the Western News company, supplying railway trains and country towns with periodicals, books, maps and current literature. In 1882, having been successful in various business ventures and investments, including a large interest in the Chicago Herald, Mr. Walsh, together with others, established the Chicago National bank. After disposing of his interest in the Herald in 1895 he founded the Chicago Chronicle, which paper suspended publication following the closing of the Walsh banks. In addition to his banks and the newspaper, Mr. Walsh was heavily interested in a large number of propositions. The Walsh interests at the time of the closing of the three banks were estimated at something like $4,000,000.

It was not until March, 1906, that Walsh was placed under arrest, and after many delays was brought to trial and convicted, being sentenced to five years' imprisonment at Fort Leavenworth prison. Soon after he had begun to serve his sentence a movement was inaugurated to secure his pardon.

NEWPORT SOCIAL INSURGENT

During the past season there has been insurgency in the ranks of Newport swelldom which started a near panic in the ranks of the "old guard." The leader of the social insurgents was Mrs. John R. Drexel, who is here pictured, and the captain of the standpatters was Mrs. Ogden Mills. Newport is to select society what Mecca is to the Mahommedans, or Benares to the Hindus, or Jerusalem to the Jew and to the Christian—the holy of holies of the idle rich, whose bible is the social register duly stamped with the dollar mark. Mrs. Drexel would widen the ranks of the select and admit many now barred from the social paradise, where nobles with decayed fortunes matrimonially browse. Mrs. Mills would none of this. She stands for a close corporation, so to speak, and would limit to 100 or even fewer those who would be entitled to enter the elect set of Newport.

Thus these two women, who are taken seriously enough by their followers, entered into a battle royal for social supremacy. Supporting Mrs. Drexel are scores of families, financially powerful, but hitherto barred from the Eden of the elect. Upholding Mrs. Mills are all those already within the inner sacred precincts, who love to shine by themselves and who do not wish to share the glories, privileges and prerogatives of their state with others.

DESCENDANT OF THE PROPHET

Will there ever be a holy war declared by Islam against her enemies? One often meets with references to such possibility and since the declaration of war against Turkey by Italy these references have been more frequent than for many years before.

But there is little probability of such a crusade by the Mohammedans against the Christians, unless in the event of a European coalition, having for its object the dismemberment of Turkey in Europe and her expulsion from the continent. The authority for this is Mohammed Ali, whose portrait is shown, a descendant of the great prophet who founded the Mohammedan religion. Mohammed Ali is now in this country and he says that a holy war will never be declared unless the dismemberment of the Ottoman empire is threatened. Then, he says, there will be an uprising of the 175,000,000 Mohammedans scattered throughout the world.

These are dwellers in Asia and Africa, principally, many of them living under the British flag in India and others under the tri-color of France in northern Africa. He contends that the possibility of such an uprising will prevent the dismemberment of Turkey and asserts that the possibility would become an actuality with the formation of a coalition against the Ottoman empire.